

ASSURANCE MATTERS

ORNAMENTAL HORTICULTURE ASSURANCE SCHEME



GREG HILL

Committee Chair


NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

As garden sales begin in full swing after a rather slow start to the season, the team at the HTA and OHAS are busy working to ensure our scheme develops in areas that are crucial to promote the transparency and accountability of the industry.

With so many changes taking place in the industry, from the phasing out of peat, to the Governments' renewed focus on biosecurity, and questions around the future availability of plant protection products, it feels like there has never been a more important time to have a UK-focused assurance scheme for ornamental horticulture. As we seek to develop the scheme in new areas, it is great to be able to offer the GRASP (GlobalGAP Risk Assessment on Social Practice) audit to our members.

"THE COMMITTEE IS ALWAYS KEEN TO HEAR FROM MEMBERS ABOUT NEW CHALLENGES BEING FACED"

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This social compliance audit is available to any member who completes the GlobalGAP annex of the Grower or Packhouse Standard. It covers the social/ethical side of business operations and is crucial to ensure that they are compliant with necessary practices and values.

GRASP can be undertaken as part of the existing OHAS audit process and helps protect stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, and shareholders by ensuring that social/ethical standards are being upheld and provides assurance that the business is acting in the best interests of all.

This is just one area in which OHAS is developing and there are many other areas for the Committee to explore and see where we can add value and support our members. The Committee is always keen to hear from members about new challenges being faced, especially those where the OHAS Scheme can offer piece of mind and ensure that it continues to protect the interests of stakeholders, mitigate risks, and maintain competitiveness in the marketplace.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANT BIOSECURITY AND ASSURANCE SCHEMES

Ensuring plant biosecurity on nurseries, packhouses and within the supply chain generally, has always been an important requirement to prevent the unintended entry of non-native pests, diseases, and plants. The topic has come to the fore since Brexit, and the renewed focus on trade agreements with the EU and further afield. In terms of ornamental crops, the risk of introducing non-native pests can be a particular issue, there are over 1,400 pests and diseases on the [UK Plant Health Risk Register](#), and unsurprisingly a good number of them can be found on the wide range of ornamental plant species which are imported into the UK every year.

Plant health and pest and disease management procedures have been a key requirement within the OHAS Grower and Packhouse Standards since their inception. There has always been a recognition that they have to be dealt with holistically, alongside other management procedures such as supplier management, quality control of incoming goods, staff training, crop monitoring and pest and disease control measures, to be robust and effective, and to be third-party audited to prove adoption and continued compliance.

WELCOME!

OHAS welcomes Amber Snelling as the new HTA Groups, Committees and Assurance Scheme Executive.

Her role is to provide administrative support to the OHAS Committee and strengthen existing relationships and communication between its members and the HTA.

Amber can be contacted via the OHAS e-mail address: ohas@hta.org.uk, or directly at amber.snelling@hta.org.uk.

Although the practical implementation of any border control system within GB has yet to be finalised and announced, being part of an assurance scheme, which has robust plant health compliance criteria could be advantageous. If an OHAS certificated business imports plant material, then it's worth bearing in mind that such certification will be useful to demonstrate competency to Defra when deciding to apply to be an authorised operator for plant health inspections. The [Authorised Operator Status \(AOS\)](#) model (trusted trader scheme) will mean once you have achieved control point designation you will be able to conduct your own plant health inspections. Another benefit of being part of the UK's leading ornamental assurance scheme.

BAN ON THE PROFESSIONAL USE OF PEAT IN GROWING MEDIA

The announced [ban on the professional use of peat by Defra](#) has implications for both the OHAS Standards and member businesses. Sections within the Grower Standard, for example, cover a need for an action plan showing commitment to more sustainable growing media use, and evidence of trials of alternative growing media, both will become more pertinent in the next two to three years. However, beyond the end of 2026, peat-free media use will be a legal requirement for most businesses (depending on the duration and scope of the exemptions granted by Defra) and the Standards will require amendment. In terms of member business implications, it's not just about commercial peat-free adoption in a planned, systematic approach, it's also about the impact on plant sourcing overseas as the peat ban will also cover imported plants grown in peat-based growing media. This could lead to a reduction in the plant and product ranges offered in the short term, and more home production in the longer term.

"BEYOND THE END OF 2026, PEAT-FREE MEDIA USE WILL BE A LEGAL REQUIREMENT FOR MOST BUSINESSES"

The largest impact though will be on growing media manufacturers. They have not only had to move away from a tried and tested raw material used over many decades, but they have also had to source new raw materials from the UK and around the world, understand them, blend them, invest in new technology to handle them, and create new products in double quick time. It will take time to establish robust supply chains of raw materials and offer year on year product consistency, it's a steep learning curve for everyone involved.



BUILDING COLLABORATION IN THE UK FLORICULTURE SECTOR - 'THE SUSTAINABLE FLOWER INITIATIVE'

During the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic there was a focus upon the challenges faced by the floriculture sector which led to funding from the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office to launch two projects on improving the future resilience of supply chains.

Partners across these projects included the Co-op, Coventry University, Fairtrade Foundation, Marks and Spencer, MM Flowers, Tesco, Partner Africa and Women Working Worldwide. Following the completion of the projects, a joint paper was created outlining key findings and providing recommendations to increase sustainability in cut flower supply chains. One of the key recommendations was the formation of what was at the time entitled a 'British Covenant for Sustainable Flowers'. This built on the ideas behind the existing Agreement for International Responsible Business Conduct in the Floricultural Sector (aka the 'Dutch Covenant') and the Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI).

Following the paper, project partners joined forces with IDH to consult further on what a 'British Covenant' could look like and mean for the sector. In January 2022, 60 participants, both from the UK and further afield, joined an online consultation event hosted by Fairtrade Foundation which highlighted the want and need for stronger collaboration within the sector.

Given this strong mandate, it was decided that further work and research was needed to identify the critical sustainability issues the sector is facing and explore how collaboration can be improved within the UK floriculture sector. The research piece was conducted via a series of interviews with leading players within the floriculture sector, and interactive round table discussions, culminating in [a report published in March 2023](#) highlighting the key sustainability challenges within the supply chain and furthermore outlining a proposed 'UK Sustainable Floriculture Network' in response to these challenges.

ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL
Carbon - emissions and measuring	Gender - gender based violence and harassment and multiple forms of discrimination.
Plant protection products - implementing integrated pest management, reduction in use and regulation	Living wage - how to ensure all workers receive a fair wage
Water - scarcity and unpredictable supplies, need for water conservation	Workers' rights - poor realisation of the right to join a union and collective bargaining
Plastics, packaging, and waste - challenges of making sustainable choices, more regulation, consumer pressure	Modern slavery - slavery and trafficking, disclosure by businesses

The 'UK Network' will not have a formal membership requirement or structure, instead participation will be via formal working groups. The working groups will allow diverse players within the sector to address key topics prioritised by members. Each working group will define its own specific ambition, related to one of the eight priority topics highlighted in the above table, and work towards a goal. **To hear more about the benefits of assurance schemes [visit OHAS on LinkedIn](#).**

NSF UPDATE - TOWARDS CERTIFICATION

This is just a quick reminder of the procedure for businesses wanting to achieve certification to the OHAS Grower, Packhouse or Growing Media Standard.

First, businesses need to be a member of the HTA (OHAS membership is included within this) or a member of OHAS directly, if HTA membership is not appropriate. To find out about OHAS subscription rates, which are based on business turnover, and to request a membership application form, e-mail ohas@hta.org.uk. Submission of the form, and payment of the subscription, is required before the audit process can commence.

Once all the required business policies, records and practices are in place, request an application pack from the Scheme Certification Body (NSF) via ohas@nsf.org. Upon completion and submission of the application form within the pack, an auditor will be allocated to the business.

Following a successful audit, an OHAS scheme certificate will be issued by NSF once the audit report has been submitted by the auditor and internally reviewed.

DEFRA WATER MANAGEMENT GRANT

Defra have recently announced that round two of the Water Management Grant has opened for 12 weeks, until the 12 July 2023, [please click here](#) for further information. The first step for growers in England is to use the online checker to check on business eligibility.

OHAS MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION AND HTA MEMBERSHIP

If you are a UK-based grower or packhouse, you can become a member of the HTA and, as OHAS is a member benefit, you will not have to pay the OHAS subscription. You can read more about [HTA membership here](#). Please note, HTA membership is not available outside the UK.

Remember that, as detailed in the OHAS Scheme Rules, you will NOT be able to book or confirm any NSF audits if your OHAS subscription is unpaid. Your organisation must be an OHAS member to use the logos and describe yourself as 'OHAS certified'.

TO JOIN OHAS

If you would like to join the scheme and are not sure where to start, or which standard best meets your needs, please send your questions or request a call, via email at ohas@hta.org.uk, and our OHAS team will guide you through it.

To find us on LinkedIn, [click here](#)

OHAS TOOLKIT

For all your OHAS template documents and current standards, go to the member toolkit zone on the HTA website here: [Member Toolkit Zone](#).

OHAS MEMBERSHIPS AND STANDARDS ENQUIRIES

For general OHAS enquiries, email us at ohas@hta.org.uk

OHAS AUDIT BOOKINGS AND ENQUIRIES

If you are already an OHAS member, or have joined us recently, and you would like to arrange your audit, please email the certification body NSF directly at ohas@nsf.org

KEEPING YOUR CONTACT DETAILS UP TO DATE

Have any of the primary contact details for your business changed (including contact phone number, email address, postal address etc.)? Has a member of your staff who was registered as the contact point with us left, and the details not updated? Please ensure that your contact details or details of the registered contact person are up to date. If you wish to amend any details, please drop us an email with the required amendments to services@hta.org.uk or ohas@hta.org.uk